

Second Sunday of Lent  
March 17, 2019  
The Rev. Jamie Samilio

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18  
Philippians 3:17-4:1  
Luke 13:31-35  
Psalm 27

## **Locks and Keys**

In looking at the Gospel it begged the question. How smart was Jesus? How intuitive was he? Did the divine in Him know the thoughts and intentions of others? How smart was he? I mean he had the basic education any carpenter would receive. He did not attend a university as many of us have—was he smarter than everyone? As creator of the world did His human self, have all the knowledge of the world? How smart was He?

Perhaps you all have another question on your mind right now—where is Jamie going with all this? Well, in the Gospel, Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod is coming to kill Him and that he should flee, hide, get away. Well, a smart person or just any sane person, being told that the major power in the land, with military resources was coming to kill them, would likely alter their plans. He showed no fear, was Jesus crazy? Herod wants to kill him and he tells the Pharisees warning him, “Tell that “fox”—the word fox being an insult—where I will be and what I will be doing for the next couple days. Then tell him he’s got nothing on me, and I will do what I want. Wow, that is pretty bold and a little crazy, or did Jesus know better?

What motivated the Pharisees to warn Jesus? Were they friends trying to protect Him or were they hoping to scare Him away from their space? I mean Jesus had crowds around him, Herod did not like him, Jesus could bring trouble to their little corner of the world, and blood is so hard to clean up. Maybe the Pharisees wanted Jesus to go somewhere else, and Jesus knew it, and he called their bluff. We actually do not know what really motivated the Pharisees to warn Jesus.

In reading this passage, I wondered if the Pharisees ever delivered Jesus’ message back to Herod. Would you have? How would that conversation go? I think if they were trying to warn Jesus to protect Him, then they could not go to Herod and say, “While we were trying to warn Jesus that you wanted to kill him, he called you a fox, and said to tell you, ‘Na na na na na, you can’t get me!’” Imagine Herod’s response, “What do you mean you tried to warn Jesus—death to you then.” Jesus insults Herod and says that that He was going to go do whatever he wanted, and Herod could not stop Him. This was not a message the Pharisees would want to report. Would you?

Jesus says, “How often have I desired to gather as a hen gathers, how Jesus longs to protect us, but we are not cooperating. We are not turning to Jesus and coming under His protection. If you ask me, we are not very smart. We run into our own homes, we protect ourselves with our earthly weapons. In the end, if only our house on earth is left to us, it is all we have for eternity. We are not very smart when we trust in earthly things and do not embrace the Psalmists words. “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?” Will we ever wise up? Only if we learn to trust.

While my take on the Gospel brought up some interesting questions, the thing that stood out for me the most from all the scriptures this week, one particular line from the Psalm haunted me, and reminded me of a moment from my childhood.

When I was about 12 years old, I remember looking out the side porch door of our house at the snow storm whipping winds, sculpting snow on the driveway and lawn as dusk fell. It was cold and dark. I

remember thinking how safe I felt inside my house. It was built around 1870 and has a large central fireplace. I stood there looking out the porch door as night fell, warm, and safe in the glow of the fire. My family was all home safely, the smell of a roast cooking filled the air, and I remember thinking in that moment, that I wanted to live in that house and hold onto that feeling of being warm and safe, and loved forever. Is there a time in your life that you wished you could hang onto forever? I usually focus my sermons on how we can become better Christians. I focus on what we can give to God. Today I ask, “what is it that you hope to gain by being a Christian?”

I ask this because I kept thinking about one line from the Psalm over and over. I have done enough funeral homilies to know that when we die, we all hold onto the hope that we will go to that mansion in the sky, that place that Jesus went to prepare for us—that is what the prescribed funeral scripture from John tells us, that there is a place for us in God’s house.

The line from the Psalm that has haunted me all week is this:

One thing have I asked of the Lord; one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; What do you value? What is it that you hope to gain by being a Christian? Is it to dwell in God’s house forever? Is that what you seek?

I think it is, what I seek. I want to be united with all God’s people, with my brothers and sisters in Christ now, and forever. I want to spend every waking moment, doing God’s will in this life. That is what I want. OK, to be honest, that is what I say I want. What I often really want is a nice safe home, good food, nice things, all the trappings of this earthly world that make me feel good in the moment. Yes, I want to do God’s will, I want to follow Jesus. I want every word out of my mouth to be filtered by that FB meme: Is it true, is it necessary, is it kind? I want all my actions to be sorted by what is right, what is good and what serves God because I want my citizenship to be in heaven! But I do not do what I want! I get St. Paul here in this one line of the Psalm. I want to dwell in the house of the Lord, but the temptations of the world keep me running away from home. It is all about where you belong.

Thinking about this, I realized that I am the key to making this happen. In Paul’s letter, I think he was trying to tell us that we should be good examples for each other. That as each of us imitates Christ in loving and caring for others, we should follow the good examples of each other. If you were one of the people in the wildfires, given 20 minutes to grab from your home what you could that will fit in a shoebox—what would you take? What we do on earth matters, but if we are only concerned with what is in the here and now, on our wants and needs fulfilled on earth, then dwelling in God’s house forever will not come to us.

One thing have I asked of the Lord; one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. Ok then, picture yourself standing on the front porch of the house of the Lord facing the door. Do you have a key? Did God give you keys to the house? How will you get in?

It took me a minute to find an answer to the question the Psalm put in my head—Do I have a key? Yes! Yes, I have several keys, because there are many locks on God’s house. Many sins and temptations that lock me out, that keep me from dwelling with God. But for every lock that keeps me out, God has given me a key. I just need to be willing to use it, regardless of what I want or need in my earthly here and now. I realized that these locks and keys have names, and finding the key that opens a lock is simple. Setting aside my earthly desires and using the key, is my challenge.

Let me review for a moment. What do we want? To dwell in the house of the Lord Forever. How do we get in? We use the keys God gave us to open the locks of sin and desire that keep us out. What are these keys? They are, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, obedience, empathy, and love—there are many gifts that are keys.

What kind of locks are on the doors of the house of the Lord that keep us out? Greed, envy, sloth, licentiousness, pride—there are many locks. How do we get these keys? By going out into the world,

following the examples Jesus set for us, and forging them. The key of humility, opens the lock of pride. The key of temperance, opens the lock of greed. The key of respect, opens the lock of lust. The key of generosity, opens the lock of envy. The key of moderation, opens the lock of gluttony. The key of good humor, opens the lock of wrath. The key of perseverance, opens the lock of sloth. Each of us face our own set of locks, but with God all things are possible, and for every lock we face, Jesus has shown us how to forge a key. Our citizenship is in heaven—it is where we belong. How do we get into the house of the Lord? Use our keys. "...behold the fair beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple." Trust God, because everything else is temporary. Amen.